THE

BURIAL

OF

JOHN BROWN.

BY

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Rifles in long derision at his side,
Flashed on December sunshine, like a pall
O'er all that speechless world, cutting the cold
And hard rapacity of civil lines
Across God's sky of light,— on, with his cheerful thoughts,
That patriot fared, and sitting on the bier,
That soon should hold his silent form, he said:
"This is a country beautiful, and first
With pleasure have I seen it now." Serene,
And clear, modest and sensible,
He passed along, eyeing in peace the hills,
That urge the steep Potomac on its flight,
By old romantic wood and cliff tower tall,—
Blue as the skies above them, far away
O'er drear Virginia's vales,—soft russet shades
The earth, and some few trees, leafless this day,
Recalling in their grace more vernal bliss.
O had the might been present in that hour!
To lift his sinking form and bear him on
With the dark race he fondly rushed to save!
O had the soul, the power acquitted then,
Its future to the world? (his name is graved,
First on the Capitol, his figure shines
Above the highest, who holds the nation's heart);
And now he asked: "Why are not all within the field,
Not only soldiers, but the citizens?"
Faithful to freedom in this cruel hour.
Why were ye faithless, heavens? Shall yon chill sky,
Wherein December's sun gleams sadly forth,
Fail to prefer one pitying look on him,
Who dies to liberate the down-trod race,
From stripes and crime, and legal butcheries,
Inexpiable, untold woes, the stake, the lash,—
Not tears, not pity, mercy, no remorse,
In those who stand around, to slay this man,
(They called him brave; "That was my mother's lesson),"
So mild and pure, an infant without guile!—
'Twas o'er, 'twas done, the noble, generous soul,
Now more than martyr, met a felon's doom.—
He went
To death!— death for a multitude, whose hearts
Were wrung with time-worn suffering, all one pang,
And torn, like desolation's corses chill,
Across some mountain-chain, where hungry wolves
Gnaw the still quivering flesh, and reek their thirst
On hearts, quick with life's pulses, went to death,
After-those words spoke on Judea's mount,
The text of love, no wild revenge or hate:
"I could have moved,

But there were prisoners, within my charge,
I did not fire, this came we for alone,
But this, no more, to free the Slave, 'tis right,
The poorest and the weakest, these we aid."
He stood, he could not fly,
His children fell, that loss was on his soul,
He spared the lives of them, who sought his own,
Weak as a dying infant spake great words,
Soft as an angel's voice, they clearly fall;
" I think my friends! you wrong both God and man,
And such as interfere in this respect,
Must act for right, to break man's galling chains,"
They answered,— " Yes,"
They felt it in their hearts, knew in their minds,
A voice sprang back from the dark centuries' folds,
" Father forgive them, they know not what they do."
They could have wept, bound up the brave man's wounds,
And set him on a throne, a hero's throne,
And triumphed him to Alabama's shores,
Or where the hot Caribbean melts her wave
Of fire and silver on the Texan's coast,
O'er Carolina's sands and rice-bound marsh,
And proud Virginia, once of Washington.
That could not be!
God's hand was on the hour,— it must not be!
Never since human breath had moulded sound,
Or given words to sense, more awful truths,
Were stretched across the strands of Fate, than those,
From that poor, simple, dying, tender soul
It could not be! by camp and tower, and ford,
By crashing cannon tearing down the glen,
In the lone forest, up dark mountains hoar,
On sea and land, and graves on earth and wave,
Sons, fathers falling, doomed without a shrift,
Unburied not unknelled, came forth that voice
From the cold armory of Harper's vale,
A prophecy of woe, " Prepare, prepare,
The soonest — best, the settlement will come,
The end's not yet," a voice of woe and war,—
Where thro' their valleys dash the liberal streams,
And at day's dying hour, the purple hills
Smile in their forests at the bounteous heavens.

His seat, is vacant now
The son is gone; his mother folds her hands,
Her hair is gray, " Yes, he was mine, 'tis just!
I gave him for the slave, that hour was God's,
The negro's blood was ours, he died for him,
(All that I loved sat in his empty chair),

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Died for the mother weeping o'er her child,
Torn from her bleeding arms; the scourging lash
Striping her naked flesh, because she wept
For her young infant's life, sold on the block—
Sold? God in heaven, yes, for her, he died!"
(Their barren fields dry shrinking in the sun,
The city's pomp is o'er, the grass grows green
Along the silent mart, the drooping flag
Fades in the hot glare of that Southern tomb).

Here, in these quiet fields, John Brown came forth,
Cradled in peace and modest competence;
In pleasant Torrington, drew first his breath,
Where swift a gleaming wave, darts Naugatuck,
And the calm hills stretch off to Wolcott's side,
Soft in their laurel clumps 'neath towers of pine,
Birthplace of kindred thought all purely reared,
Where mellow Alcott spake and fetched that strain
Of sweet, melodious converse. O ye hills!
And groves, and charming greensward meads,
Of rural Torrington, never had yet,
A more devoted soul emerged to life,
Among the baffling shades that sepulchre,
This large, afflictive, unwound web of time,
Than him, I vainly speak of.
From your force,
A child, he drew perpetual courage,
Full rich in the love of a good mother,
To life's adventure saintly and resigned,
Taught to serve truth, seek God and do the right!
Yes! must there move all blessings in this air
Of dear Connecticut, o'er her green fields,
Her lone romantic hills, her torrents bold,
And yonder wave-fringed town, whence busy Yale
Pours forth such learned rivers, o'er the States.
And still, it stands, the home where he was born,—
The homely house, domestic in its style,
As he, who there first felt the wrench of time,
With sloping roof behind, with windows quaint,
And lavish chimney from its centre flung,
Shaming the villa's brick. And here he played,
A merry boy beneath the low stone wall,
Or saw the sunset fade across the lines
That suit yon happy fields. Here, as a child,
Along the meadows, where the streamlet glides,
No future condescension could reveal
The boding years, and yet remain these things;
But he, who saw them so unconsciously
Of days in store, he may not come again,
When even the weeds and tall, neglected grass,

Whisper their fitful surmise to the breeze,
That overtops their dreams! Widely the day,
On this uncumbered horizon falls in
From those blue skies, a house standing so free,
In its society of light and air.
What tho' its casements rattle in the blast,
Immortal deeds within them sprang to life!
Not long his hours among his household gods,
For, far away, where bold Ohio's stream,
Pours down her volume, past Kentucky's vales,
And further yet, and in maturer years,
He spent his strength upon that prairie fight
For bleeding Kansas, when Missouri's crimes
Burnt thro' a freeman's heart and lit its flames.
There, came the sorrow o'er him, there his race
Fell at the Southern rifle, there he fought,
And with superior calmness, or swift guile
Such as a woodman's creed sweetly allows,
Thus preached a hero's truth, saintly if strong,
Wise Ossawatomie!
He knew not that,—
The day in Harper's vale. Never he heard,
Those pealing strains ascend from camp and town,
"We're marching on," unknown, unheard-of lived,
Where the dark Adirondacs fling the pine,
Up the unsounded ramparts of their chains,
And lakes, whence the wild waterfall alone,
Whirls thro' the steep-cut flume a curdling hymn.
There, as a settler on the silent lands,
Within his heart musing of many things,
His children near, their mother by his side,
(She, who walked truly with him to the end,
Soothed his affliction, staunched his wounds with love),
There, in that tranquil Elba, might have lived,—
And all that is, not been?
Most vain that thought!
Before him lay the laws, the swift reward,
The spy, the bribe, the scoff, hunted from town
To town, bearing a charmed life, for death
Grimly prepared. And still that voice, a cry
From breaking hearts, more wretched than his own.
That simple, childlike, helpless, loving race,—
Enough, he heard it still!
No, no, not rest,
He knew no rest, sleeping or waking none!
Holding his plough across the fresh-broke swards,
When fell his children in the prairie-fight,
Or at the good man's burial from the church,
In storm or calm, in danger or repose,

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"Do ye for us, as we should do, for you,
We are the poor, oppressed, and you — the strong."
Nor aid he sought, nor force of arms nor men,
But in his daring heart, and soldier's brain,
Matched to heroic will with earnest prayers,
And those few watchful souls who knew this man,
As one, a bride, upon a summer morn,
To some sweet sacrifice of all her dower,
Devoted to the death for him she loves,
He went, not all alone!
That race kept with him,
The oppressed, the weak, those who him needed.
The souls went too, of all the martyred good,
Who died for men, stars that adorn the Past,
And light the sky of ages, lamps of fame!
And one whom he had worshiped from his birth,
The Savior! Those too, him half-way welcomed,
Fluent and loud, fixed pioneers of speech,
Who poured forth abolition, and preferred
Scant reconcilement in all human souls,
To close companionship. And women,
Of tried passion, who surprised man's fortitude,
And off their silvery lips loosed the shrill breath
Of liberty into war's clarion keen,
Shaping man's rancor.
With this host he passed,—
All that was acting on life's stage, he passed:
Or crowding street, or miscellaneous wain,
Towering with luxuries, the Mill whose bleach,
Was spun from bloody thread; the Court, the Church,
Where never yet, that name of Slave was breathed,
He knew them well, twas the loud treacherous world,
He oft had dreamed of, masking Human Right,
(Pouring envenomed death, thro' life and love)
Till one man touch the cords and launch the bark,
With loud acclaim, United Liberty!

He came, he touched the cords, 'tis done!
The chain is snapt; the vessel leaves the shore.